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FOOD NEWS

FOR CONSUMERS

Volume 9 Number 2 Summer 1992

United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service



FOOD NEWS

Summer 1992
Vol. 9, No. 2

Food News for Consumers is published by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, the agency charged with ensuring the safety, wholesomeness and proper labeling of the nation's meat and poultry supply. The magazine reports how FSIS acts to protect public safety, covering research findings and regulatory efforts important in understanding how the agency works and how consumers can protect themselves against foodborne illness.

Assistant Secretary for Marketing and Inspection Services
Jo Ann R. Smith

FSIS Administrator
H. Russell Cross

Associate Administrator
Donald L. White

Director, Information and Legislative Affairs
David B. Schmidt

Chief, Public Awareness
Wayne Baggett

Editor
Mary Ann Parmley
(202) 690-0351

News Wires Editor
Liz Lapping

Design Director
Julie Olson

Cover Illustration
Cameron Gerlach

Production Coordinator
Maxine Grant

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Send comments and inquiries to: Editor, *Food News for Consumers*, FSIS/1LA, Room 1165 South, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, Telephone: (202) 690-0351.

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Taking Food Safety to the Great Outdoors

*A Message from FSIS's New Administrator,
Dr. H. Russell Cross*

You might say this is a dual introduction for me—introducing myself to *Food News* readers as the new FSIS administrator and introducing the summer issue of our consumer food safety magazine.

Protecting the public health is my number one priority as FSIS administrator, so I am pleased to be able to address the importance of summertime food safety practices.

The Centers for Disease Control recently published statistics that show sharp jumps in foodborne illness over the warm summer months. The common foodborne bacteria campylobacter, salmonella, hemorrhagic *E. coli* and listeria are the chief offenders.

Of course, if you're not a food professional that listing may not tell you very much. What you need to know is how to keep your food safe. That's what this issue is all about.

Whether you are planning a camping trip, a beach or boat outing or just a short car trip, there is advice here on how to plan ahead and cope with the food handling aspects of your trip.

There is also an egg question handbook—how to handle fresh eggs today when we know that some unbroken eggs can contain *Salmonella enteritidis*. There's a babysitter's guide to food safety for teenagers who may sit with younger children over the summer, and a supplement you can copy called "Keep Your Food Safe," easy-to-use tips for those with limited reading ability. My staff tells me many readers urgently need low-literate materials for classroom and client use.

I'm pleased to introduce this summer edition of *Food News*—yet another issue full of newly researched, useful data. I think you will agree that it continues the FSIS tradition of continually raising awareness of food safety concerns to protect the public health.



Dr. H. Russell Cross holds a doctorate in animal and food science and headed the Department of Animal Science at Texas A & M University before becoming administrator of USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service. Dr. Cross has won national recognition for his leadership in providing consumers with leaner beef, representing the needs of farmers and for outstanding excellence as a scientist and educator.

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- 15 *FSIS has new, useful backgrounders available on the foodborne bacteria campylobacter, Listeria monocytogenes and salmonella.*

- 15 *The first NEFLE (National Exchange for Food Labeling Education) conference provided a forum where participants discussed how to educate consumers on the new nutrition labels due out in 1994.*

Food Safety on the Road

by Marianne H. Gravely

Here we go! Mom, Dad, the kids and everything but the kitchen sink and cat! We're taking a family vacation.

Picnicking on the side of the road.

Like many families, we'll be taking food with us for picnics and to keep little stomachs (and mouths) full in the car.

But improperly stored food could result in an unwanted vacation souvenir—*foodborne illness*.

Packing and storing food with *food safety* in mind can prevent this vacation disaster, and isn't that difficult. Just remember the Five Rules of Travelling with Food.

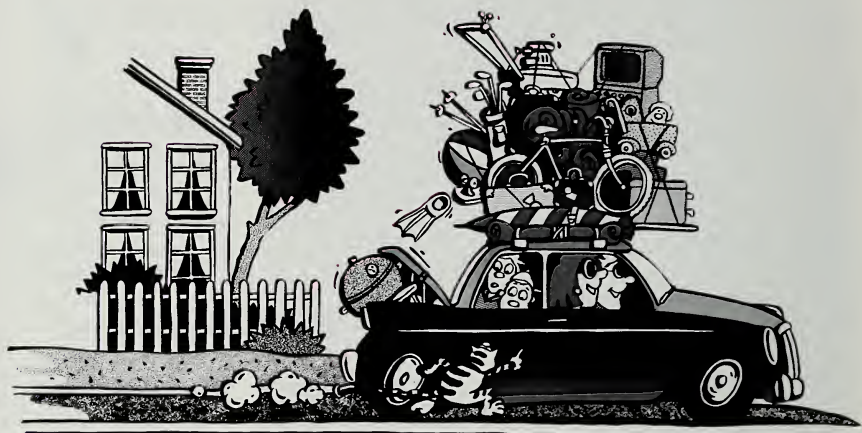
1. Plan Ahead. A well-stocked cooler is a must. Have plenty of ice or *frozen* gel-packs on hand before you start packing.

What to take? Some foods don't require refrigeration—peanut butter and jelly and some cheeses, for example. Perishable foods, like meat, poultry, eggs and fish do, so if you're taking summer salads, making sandwiches on the road or bringing food to cook over the course of your vacation, plan to keep them on ice in your cooler throughout the trip.

2. Pack Safely. Pack perishables directly from the refrigerator to the cooler. You can pack meat and poultry while it is still frozen. It will thaw during the trip, extending its safety and shelf-life.

A full cooler will maintain its cold temperature longer than one that is only partially filled. Pack the remaining space with more ice or with fruit and non-perishable foods.

Securely overwrap or bag foods that may drip or leak, particularly raw meat, poultry or fish.



For longer trips take two coolers—one for the day's lunch and snacks, the other for perishables to be used later. Keep big and little hands out of the perishables cooler.

Put the cooler in the passenger section of the car instead of in the hot trunk.

3. Preserve the cold temperature of the cooler by replenishing the ice as soon as it starts melting.

4. Pitch any foods that warm above refrigerator temperature (40° F). Food poisoning bacteria grow rapidly at warm temperatures. At the end of the day, if the ice has melted and the food feels warm, discard any meat or poultry left. Non-perishables, like fruits, vegetables, breads and drinks do not require refrigeration and should be okay.

5. Protect your family from disease-causing bacteria by keeping hands and utensils clean. If soap and water will not be available, pack some moist towelettes. Bag and set aside dishes and utensils to wash with hot soapy water when you reach your destination.

Packing food for the trip is a money- and time-saver for today's road warriors. Resealable bottles of juice or sodas are more economical than individual cans or bottles. Bring a plastic cup for each member of the family. Store ice for drinks in a leak-proof, resealable container in the cooler. After lunch, repack the cooler with non-perishables to fill it up.

Family-sized bags of chips and snacks save money over lunch-size bags and also cut down on your trash. Offering a small snack every hour or two will prevent boredom during long car trips. Offer a snack before your children announce that they're hungry!

Some snacks are better than others in the car—fresh and dried fruit, cheese and soft cookies are fairly easy for little hands to manage without making a mess. ♦

For more information on summer trekking or other food handling questions, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-800-535-4555, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays Eastern Time. Washington, D.C. area residents call 202-720-3333.

Food Safety and the Weekend Camper

by Patricia Moriarty, R.D.

You want to get back to nature—fresh air, exercise and old-fashioned outdoor cooking. But how can you manage without sanitation and refrigeration?

Foodborne bacteria can multiply rapidly in warm outdoor temperatures, and food poisoning is the last thing a happy camper needs.

So here's a "Camper's Checklist" to get you off to a safe start.

1. Choosing A Cooler. Foam chests are lightweight, low cost, and actually have good "cold retention" power. But they're fragile and may not last through numerous outings.

Plastic, fiberglass or steel coolers are more durable and can take a lot of outdoor wear. They have excellent "cold retention" power but, once filled, larger models may weigh 30 or 40 pounds.

2. Keeping Cold Foods Cold. A block of ice keeps longer than ice cubes. Use clean, empty milk cartons to prefreeze blocks of ice or use frozen gel-packs.

Fill the cooler with COLD or FROZEN foods.

Pack foods in reverse-use order. First foods packed are last to be used.

Take foods in the smallest size needed (e.g., a small jar of mayonnaise).

In the car, put the ice chest in the passenger section. At the campsite, insulate the cooler with a blanket, tarp or poncho.

3. Camp Cuisine. Today's camper has many more food choices than the Daniel Boones of yesteryear. Advances in food technology have produced relatively lightweight staples that don't need refrigeration or careful packing.



For example...

- Peanut butter in plastic jars
- Concentrated juice boxes
- Canned tuna, ham, chicken and beef
- Dried noodles and soups
- Beef jerky and other dried meats
- Dehydrated foods
- Dried fruits and nuts
- Powdered milk and fruit drinks

Carry items like rice or noodles in plastic bags and take only the amount you'll use.

4. Water—Is It Safe? Another tough camping problem is access to reliable tap water. Bring bottled water for drinking or mixing with food. Always assume stream and river waters are not safe to drink. If you camp in remote areas, purchase commercial purification tablets or equipment and learn purification techniques.

5. The Clean Hands-and-Pots Club. If no safe water supply is available, or your bottled water supply is limited, use disposable wipes to clean your hands when working with food.

Take as few pots as possible. Carry items that fit inside each other. Plan one-pot meals. You can use aluminum foil wrap and pans for cooking, but take garbage bags to carry these items back to appropriate disposal sites.

Many camping areas, particularly national parks, prohibit campfires so assume you'll have to take a stove.

Leftover food should be burned, not dumped. If using soap to clean pots, wash the pots at camp, not at the water's edge. Dump dirty water on dry ground, well away from fresh water. ❖

To Learn More

Check your local library for advice on choosing a campsite, protecting your food from animals, disposing of garbage, etc.

Contact sources such as the:
American Camping Association
5000 State Road 67 N
Martinsville, Ind. 46151

and the
National Campers and
Hikers Association
4804 Transit Road Bldg. 2
Depew, N.Y. 14043.

For more information on summer trekking or other food handling questions, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-800-535-4555, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays Eastern Time. Washington D.C. area residents call 202-720-3333.

A Boater's Guide to Food Safety

by Dianne Durant

Out on the boat at last, you're looking forward to "catchin' some rays." Fish even. The last thing you want is foodborne illness.

But like a lot of boaters, you could be taking some chances. Too much sun and heat can make perishable food dangerous.

Perishable picnic foods and your catch must be handled with care. Mishandled food can become contaminated with bacteria and cause food poisoning.

1. Staying Safe. Bessie Berry, with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Meat and Poultry Hotline, explains how to protect yourself.

- Perishable foods, like lunch meats, cooked chicken, and potato or pasta salads, should be kept in a cooler.
- Pack your cooler with several inches of ice or use frozen gel-packs.
- Store food in water-tight containers to prevent contact with melting ice water.
- Keep the cooler out of the sun, covered, if possible, for further insulation.

2. Tricks of the trade. Not all foods need refrigeration, and Berry suggests that some good non-perishables for boat trips are fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts, trail-mix, canned meat spreads and, yes, peanut butter and jelly. (Once canned meats are opened, put them in the cooler.)

If you don't have a cooler, try freezing sandwiches for your outing. Use coarse-textured breads that don't get soggy when thawed. Take the mayonnaise, lettuce and tomato with you to add at mealtime.

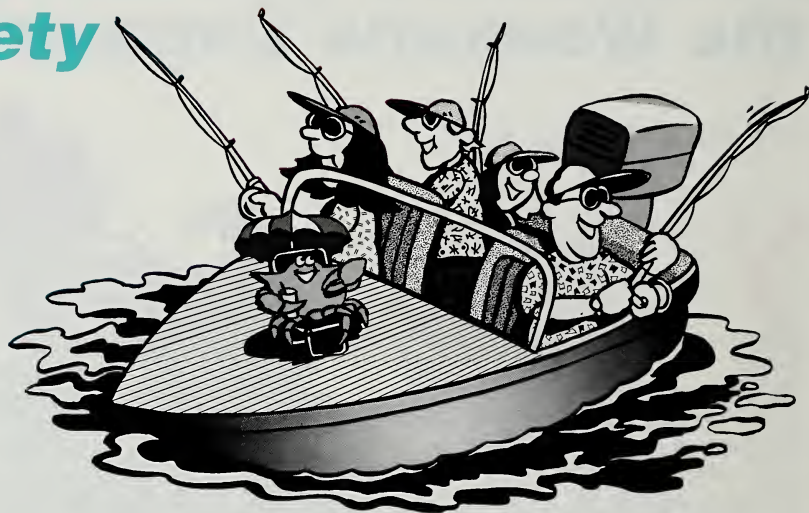
If you bring a cooler, Berry says keep the lid closed as much as possible. Store

soft drinks and non-perishable favorites in another case.

3. Leftovers? Put perishables back on ice as soon as you finish eating. Don't let food sit out while you swim or fish. **Food sitting at outside temperatures for more than 2 hours is not safe. At 90 degrees or above, food should not sit out over 1 hour.** At high temperatures,

food spoils quickly. If you have any doubts, throw it out. ❖

For more information on summer trekking or other food handling questions, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-800-535-4555, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., weekdays Eastern Time. Washington, D.C. area residents call 202-720-3333.



Keeping the Catch

Check first with your fish and game agency or state health department to see where you can fish safely, then follow these guidelines.

FINFISH

- Scale, gut and clean fish as soon as they're caught.
- Live fish can be kept on stringers or in live wells, as long as they have enough water and mobility to breathe.
- Wrap both whole and cleaned fish in water-tight plastic and store on ice.
- Keep 3 to 4 inches of ice on the bottom of the cooler. Alternate layers of fish and ice.
- Store the cooler out of the sun and cover with a blanket.

- Once home, eat fresh fish in 1 to 2 days or freeze. For top quality, use frozen fish in 3 to 6 months.

SHELLFISH

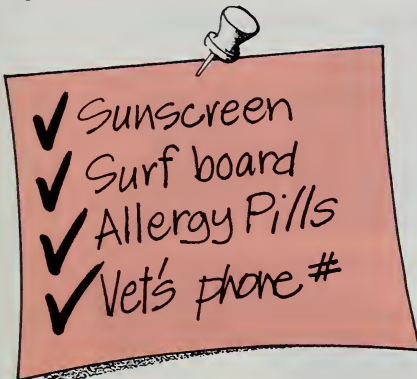
For safety, crabs, lobsters and other shellfish must be kept alive until cooked. Store in live wells or out of water in a bushel or laundry basket under wet burlap.

Crabs and lobsters are best eaten the day they're caught. Live oysters should be cooked in 7-10 days; mussels and clams in 4-5 days.

Caution: Everyone should be aware of the potential dangers of eating raw shellfish. Persons with liver disorders or weakened immune systems should not do so.

Food Safety at the Beach

by Barbara O'Brien, R.D.



You've seen that commercial—the young couple is checking everything off, but they're about to forget the baby!

Food safety is another critical factor you don't want to forget at the beach. It's as important as water and boating safety.

Here are some tips to help ensure that the worst problem you or your family comes home with is sand in everything!

1. Plan Ahead. Keep your menu simple and take only the amount of food you will use. Plan some take-along foods that do not require refrigeration like peanut butter, hard cheeses, fruits and dried meats. Pack perishables in a cooler.

If grilling is your thing, check ahead to make sure your beach area allows outdoor cooking. Consider buying your perishable food at a store near the beach and putting it in an ice-filled cooler.

Ready-made sandwiches or cooked foods are fine too. Just put them in the cooler until you're ready to eat.

2. Pack Safe. At home, pack right from the refrigerator. Freeze sandwiches ahead and add tomatoes, lettuce and mayo later. Use an insulated cooler with ice or frozen gel-packs to keep the

temperature inside under 40° F. Note: Large blocks of ice melt more slowly than cubes.

Put all perishables in one cooler; keep beverages and plain water in a separate cooler. This keeps the perishable foods safer as the drinks cooler is opened more.

3. At the Beach. When you've found the perfect spot—preferably away from trash containers, real magnets for flies and bees—put the coolers under a beach umbrella and cover them with blankets. Or you can partially bury the coolers in the sand, again shading them with a blanket and umbrella.

Make sure everyone washes their hands before handling food or eating. Moist towelettes or wash cloths in resealable bags are good when running water is not available.

Put perishable foods back in the cooler right after eating; do not let them sit out, even under the umbrella, while you go for a swim. Perishable foods left out of refrigeration for over 2 hours—1

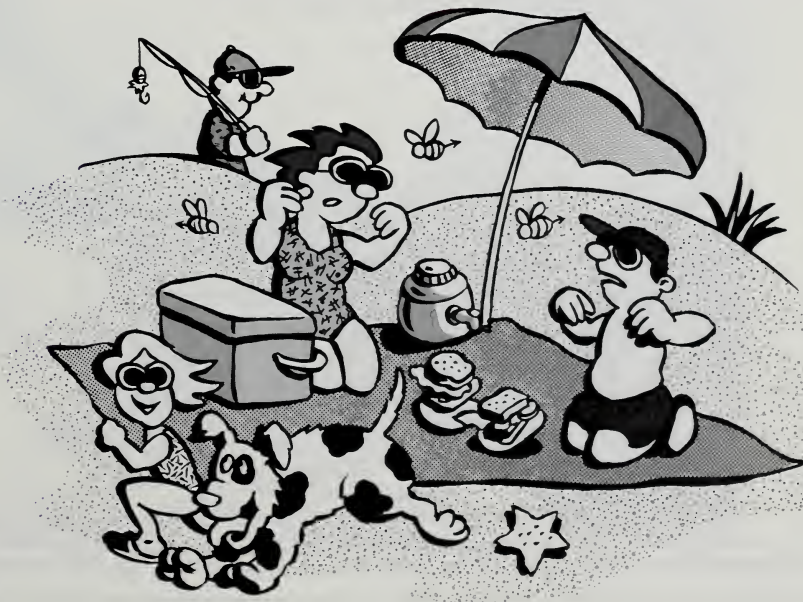
hour when it's above 90° F—are not safe and should be discarded.

If insects are a real problem, there are netting devices available to place over food to keep it bug-free. Spray insect repellants away from the food.

4. Leftovers? If there is still ice in the cooler when you get home, and the food did not sit out for over 1 hour, the food is okay to save. If the cold source has melted or is only cool, do not use any of the perishable leftovers.

5. Boardwalk dining. A stroll down the boardwalk often leads to food. Make sure the food stand you choose looks clean and well-managed and that the hot foods are served *hot* and cold foods are served *cold*. DON'T eat something that may have been sitting on display in the hot sun. ❖

For more information on summer trekking or other food handling questions, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, 1-800-535-4555, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays Eastern Time. Washington, D.C. area residents call 202-720-3333.



KEEP YOUR FOOD SAFE— Shopping, Storage and Cooking Tips*

by Liz Lapping

Food that goes bad can make you sick. This is called food poisoning.

Sometimes when people think they have the “flu” or a “stomach bug,” they really have food poisoning.

What makes foods go bad? Germs. They get on foods and grow. You cannot see germs on food.

You cannot always smell or taste them either.

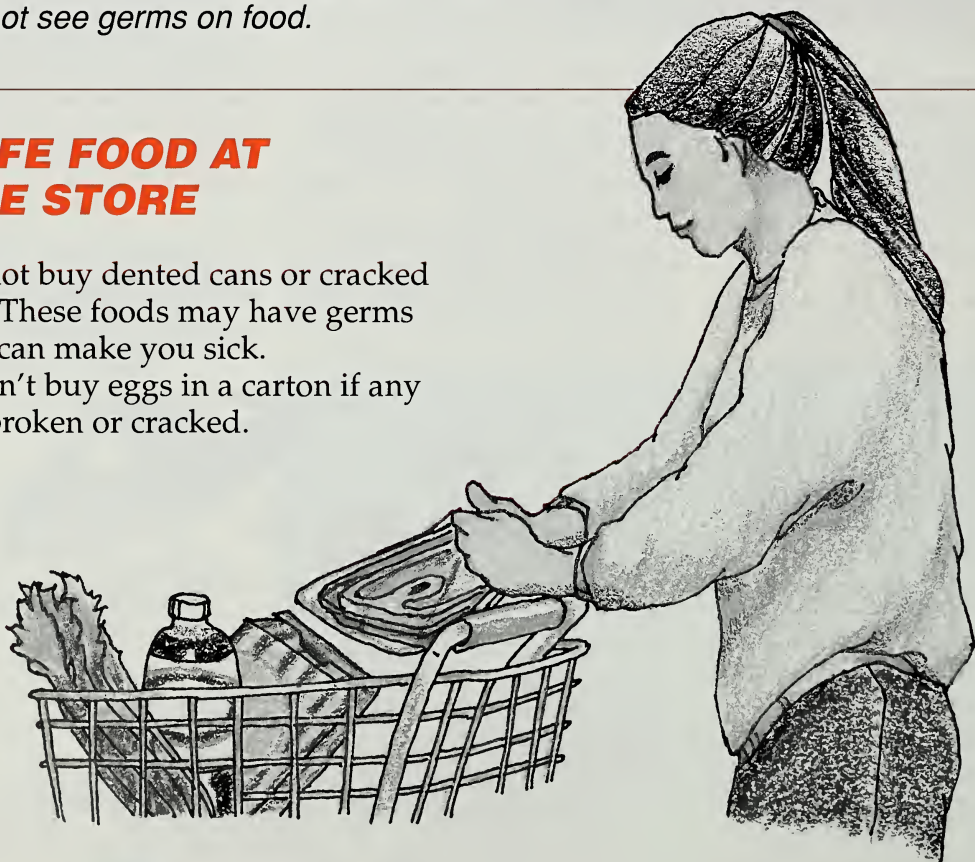
Some foods that germs like best are milk and other dairy products, eggs, meat, poultry and seafood.

You can keep food safe by buying safe food and keeping it safe at home.

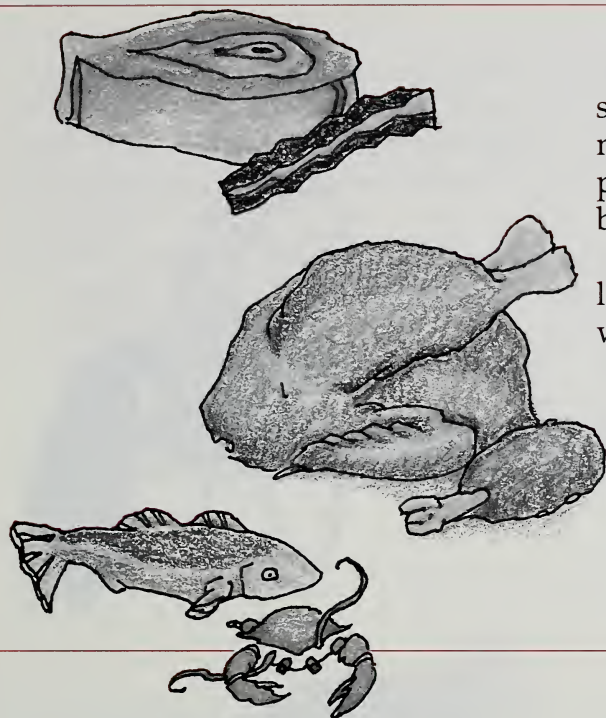
SAFE FOOD AT THE STORE

Do not buy dented cans or cracked jars. These foods may have germs that can make you sick.

Don't buy eggs in a carton if any are broken or cracked.



*Adapted from Keep Your Food Safe, a U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) publication



Raw meat, poultry and seafood sometimes drip. The juices that drip may have germs. Put raw meat, poultry and seafood into plastic bags before they go into your cart.

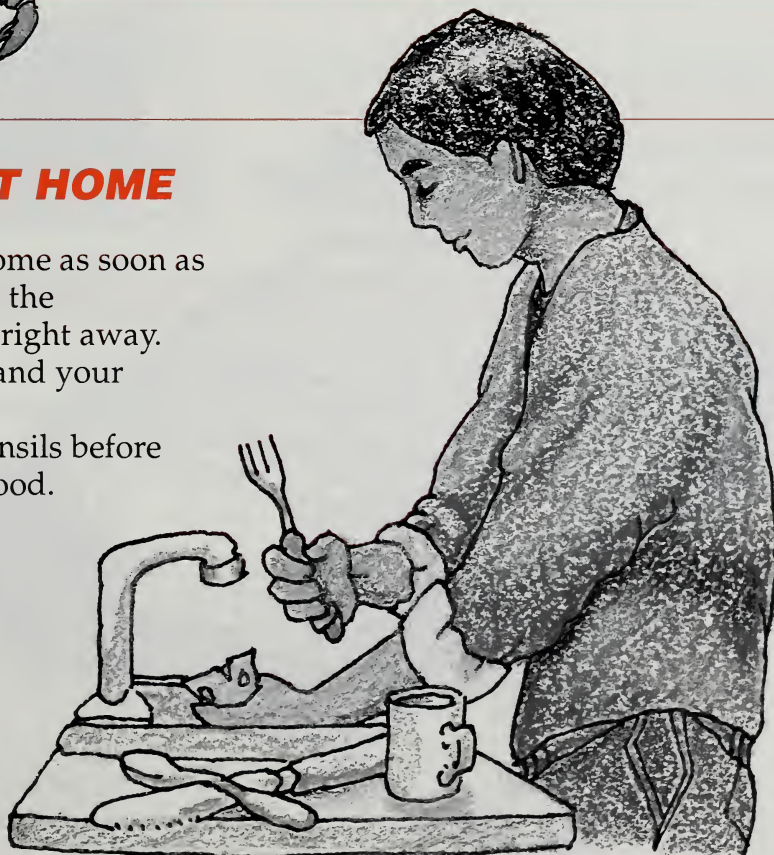
Pick up milk and other cold foods last. This will give them less time to warm up before you get home.

SAFE FOOD AT HOME

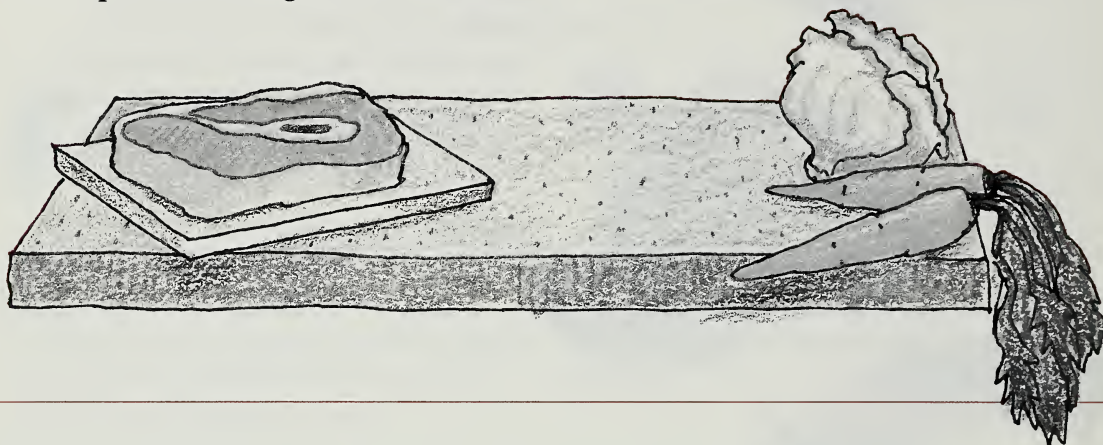
After shopping, get home as soon as you can. Put food into the refrigerator or freezer right away.

Make sure that you and your kitchen are clean.

Wash hands and utensils before and after they touch food.

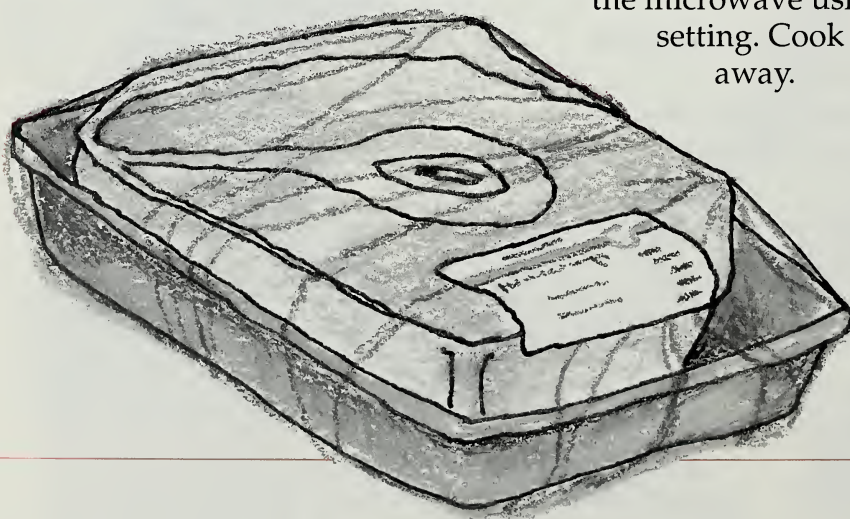


Wood cutting boards are very hard to clean. Germs hide in the cracks. Use a plastic cutting board instead.



Keep the juices from raw meat, raw poultry and raw seafood away from other foods since the juices have germs.

Meat, poultry and seafood need to stay cold while they thaw. Thaw them in the refrigerator 1 or 2 days before you will cook the food, or in the microwave using the "defrost" setting. Cook the food right away.

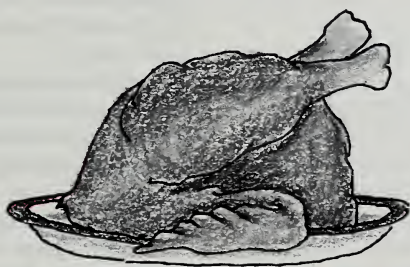


Raw meat, raw poultry, raw seafood and raw eggs can make you sick. Cook them until they are done.

- Cooked red meat looks brown inside.
- Poke cooked chicken with a fork. The juices should look clear, not pink.
- Dig a fork into cooked fish. The fish should flake.

- Cooked egg whites and yolks are firm, not runny.
- Put leftovers in the refrigerator or freezer within 2 hours after eating. Eat the leftovers in the next few days, before they go bad.

Remember, if you think a food might be bad, do not taste it.



WHEN IN DOUBT, THROW IT OUT!

To order your free copy of the *Keep Your Food Safe* booklet, write:

USDA, FSIS
Public Awareness Office
Room 1165 South Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20250. ✚

For other questions about food safety, call the USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555. The Hotline is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. Washington, D.C. area residents should dial (202) 720-3333.



The Egg Handling Handbook

by CiCi Williamson, C.H.E.*

It's a whole new situation with eggs today. Eggs have been implicated in an increasing number of cases of foodborne illness. The real culprits? Mishandling as well as bacteria lurking inside some shells.

The bacteria is *Salmonella enteritidis*. The problem surfaced in the Northeastern United States a few years ago and is now moving across the country.

Salmonella is found more frequently in the yolk which can support bacterial growth. Egg whites are less likely to harbor bacteria but may still be a problem. The U.S. Department of Agriculture does not recommend eating raw or undercooked egg yolks, whites or products containing them.

"Most egg-borne illness is a result of leaving eggs out at room temperature, pooling eggs and incomplete cooking," said Betsy Crosby, a home economist in the Poultry Division of USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service.

Pooling occurs most often in food service establishments where many eggs are cracked into one bowl for later use, and the bowl may be left out at room temperature for a long period of time. Salmonella from one egg can contaminate the whole bowl, and the bacteria can multiply quickly at room temperature.

The good news is that the proper storing, handling and cooking of eggs can prevent foodborne illness. There are also ways to satisfy people who are

reluctant to give up "runny" eggs and recipes traditionally made with raw eggs.

You can continue to enjoy eggs and egg-rich foods if you follow these safe handling guidelines.

Safe Handling of Eggs

At the store: Choose Grade A or AA eggs with clean, uncracked shells. Shop at a reputable grocery. *Buy only eggs that have been kept refrigerated*, never those sitting out at room temperature. Any bacteria present in eggs can grow rapidly outside refrigeration.

If the egg carton has a date printed on it, make sure it hasn't passed.

Get eggs into a 40° F home refrigerator as soon as possible. Leave eggs in their original carton in a colder section of the refrigerator, not in the door. Do not wash eggs prior to storage because that will remove the protective coating applied at the packaging plant.

Refrigerator storage: Fresh shell eggs can be kept safely in the refrigerator 3 to 5 weeks from the *date of purchase*, not from the date on the carton.

If eggs get cracked on the way home, break them into a clean container, cover tightly, refrigerate them and use within 2 days.

Sometimes recipes require separated eggs and you may have either the whites or the yolks left over. Refrigerate egg whites in a tightly closed container and cover yolks with cold water before storing for up to 4 days.

Freezer storage: For longer storage, you can freeze eggs after beating yolks and whites together. Or freeze separated whites by themselves. To freeze yolks separately, mix 4 yolks with a pinch of salt and 1 1/2 teaspoons of sugar or corn syrup. Store frozen eggs up to 6 months.

If eggs freeze accidentally in their shells, keep them frozen until needed; then defrost in the refrigerator. Discard eggs whose shells cracked during freezing.

Handling eggs: Wash hands, utensils, equipment and work areas with hot, soapy water before and after they come in contact with eggs and raw egg-rich foods. Avoid keeping eggs out of the refrigerator for more than 2 hours, including time for preparing and serving (but not cooking).

Serve cooked egg dishes immediately after cooking, or refrigerate at once for serving later. When refrigerating a large amount of a hot food, divide it into several shallow containers so it will cool quickly. Use within 3 to 4 days, or freeze for longer storage.

Fancy Egg Recipes

The egg is found in every cuisine of the world. In fact, one of the first known recipes featured eggs. To prepare "Ova Mellita," or sweet eggs, ancient Romans were directed to beat eggs with honey and cook the mixture in an earthenware dish. From its title, we get the modern word "omelette."

*Certified Home Economist

This recipe is still safe to make. However, some other recipes in their current forms are not.

Caesar salad was created in 1924 by Italian chef Caesar Cardini who owned a restaurant in Tijuana, Mexico. Made with a raw egg dressing, it's not safe today.

Neither is **Hollandaise sauce**, created by a French chef to honor the dairy products for which Holland is famous. The hot butter and lemon juice in the recipe don't destroy bacteria potentially present in the egg yolks.

To update these recipes as well as **homemade mayonnaise, salad dressings and uncooked egg-rich sauces**, use pasteurized eggs or egg substitutes.

In some markets, you may find refrigerated, frozen and dried pasteurized egg products or egg substitutes. These products are eggs which have been removed from the shells and commercially heated to destroy bacteria but are not cooked. This process cannot be done at home.

These products are safe to use in recipes that call for raw or lightly cooked eggs. Try them to see if they work to your satisfaction.

Everyday Eggs

Many "old favorite" recipes were written before salmonella made eggs a problem. Other recipes may have been written by cooks uninformed about the danger of eating raw eggs.

"Unless an egg recipe is cooked thoroughly, there's no 100% guarantee of its safety," says USDA's Betsy Crosby.

"You can find articles in scientific journals where laboratories have tested the role acidity has in destroying bacteria, for example—by adding lemon juice to eggs. This can be effective but it's difficult to duplicate in the home. Be prepared to evaluate the safety of recipes based on USDA recommendations."

For optimal safety, eggs should be thoroughly cooked so both yolks and whites are firm. This advice is particularly important for those people most at risk for foodborne illness—the elderly, the very young, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems.

People unwilling to give up their favorite "runny" eggs can minimize their risk by cooking or microwaving an egg until the white is completely firm and the yolk begins to thicken but is not hard.

Fried eggs should be cooked 2 to 3 minutes on each side or in a covered pan 4 minutes. **Scrambled eggs** should be cooked until firm throughout. **Poach eggs** in boiling water 5 minutes or boil them in the shell 7 minutes.

Lightly cooked foods such as French toast should be avoided for those in the high-risk groups.

Egg mixtures are safe if they reach 160° F. So recipes such as eggnog can be made safe if the raw eggs are heated with liquid or another ingredient contained in the recipe. Use a thermom-

eter to check the temperature of egg mixtures.

An additional safety check for egg dishes such as **quiche** and casseroles is that a knife inserted in the center comes out clean.

Egg-rich desserts: Some recipes such as **chiffon pies** and **fruit whips** are made with raw beaten egg whites. These cannot be guaranteed safe. Either substitute whipped cream or use pasteurized dried egg whites available in cake decorating departments.

To make **key lime pie** safely, heat the lime juice with the raw egg yolks in a pan on the stove, stirring constantly, until the mixture reaches 160° F. Then combine it with the sweetened condensed milk and pour filling into baked pie crust. Top with meringue. Bake all **meringue-topped pies** at 350° F for at least 15 minutes.

Simmer small **poached meringues** in liquid 5 minutes or until firm. **Dry meringue shells** are safe as are **divinity candy** and **7-minute frosting**, made by combining hot sugar syrup with beaten egg whites.

For other recipes like ice cream and soft custard, you can use fresh eggs if you start with a cooked base. Heat gently until the mixture coats a metal spoon. ❖

For further information about handling and cooking eggs safely, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 1-800-535-4555 weekdays from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Eastern time. Washington, D.C. area residents call 202-720-3333.

Feeding Babies and Young Children

A Teen Sitter's Guide to Food Safety

Keeping a Baby

A number of childcare experts think you should be at least 13 to sit with an infant. They also suggest you visit the baby's house first before you keep the baby by yourself.

Go over everything you need to know with the parent—how to hold, feed and burp the baby, the sleep schedule, where supplies are kept and how to change diapers. Is there a medical condition you should know about? Learn the kitchen and microwave.

Request a list of key numbers by the phone. Get the parent's and a neighbor's number. You, of course, know to call "911" or the local emergency number for fire and police.

Baby's bottle.

Older babies can drink a bottle from the refrigerator. Younger babies (6 months and under) need lukewarm food. To warm a bottle

- Heat milk in a disposable insert in a plastic bottle by holding it under hot tap water a few minutes. Test the milk's temperature on top of your hand. At body temperature—when you can barely feel a drop on your skin—it's ready for the baby.
- Be careful warming hard plastic or glass bottles in the microwave. Remove the cap and nipple. Heat a refrigerated 8-ounce bottle 30 seconds on HIGH. Let stand for a minute. Shake and test on your hand.

If you have plenty of bottles and the baby nearly drained the first one, discard the leftover milk. But if there are only a few prepared bottles and the baby drank very little, put the used bottle right back in the refrigerator. Use it at the next feeding.

Baby food.

Check that the safety button in the lid of a glass jar of baby food is down and that the lid "pops" when you open it. Don't use the food otherwise. Don't use food



Babysitting may be the first job you ever have. It may also be the most important job you ever have.

It's your job to keep the kids safe. You have to know how to handle accidents, fire, strange phone calls.

You also need to know how to handle food. A baby is so tiny even a little bit of unsafe food could make it very sick. Young children are also vulnerable to foodborne illness.

So take a minute to review these tips. Then you can guard those soft, cuddly youngsters you keep from foodborne as well as other problems.

from jars with chipped glass or rusty lids either.

Baby fruits and vegetables can be served at room temperature, but to heat other baby foods

- Spoon a portion from the jar into a microwave dish. Don't put the jar in the microwave! A small serving should heat on HIGH in 8 seconds. Stir and let stand a short time. Caution: Stir and taste for lukewarm temperature before feeding the baby, otherwise "hot spots" in the food could burn the baby's mouth.
- Do not heat baby meats or meat sticks in the microwave. They heat unevenly.

Leftovers, Snacks for Older Kids

To microwave leftovers or a simple meal

- Use microwave dishes only and set the timer a little short. You can always microwave more to finish heating, but you can't save ruined food.
- If cooking a microwave food from the package, follow directions carefully.
- Stir food half-way through the heating time to even out temperature.
- Use hotpad holders when removing dishes from the microwave. Let popcorn sit for a few minutes before opening. Open popcorn and remove plastic wrap on other items so steam escapes away from your face and hands.
- Let food stand to cool before serving. Cut into cheese hotdogs or filled pasta shells before eating. The fillings get very hot.

Kitchen "Musts"

- Make sure you and the children wash your hands before and after handling food.
- Keep kitchen and dishes as clean as possible. Put cold foods back in the refrigerator as soon as you've used them.
- Healthy eating - Fresh fruits and vegetables are better for the kids...and for you...than sweet, salty or greasy foods.
- Foods that can choke - Don't give young children hard candy, nuts or popcorn. Cut hotdogs, grapes and other solid foods into small pieces to serve. ♦

—Mary Ann Parmley

TO LEARN MORE, write the Consumer Information Center, Dept. 535-Y, Pueblo, Colo. 81009 for a free copy of a "Quick Consumer Guide to Safe Food Handling." Consider taking Red Cross or other first aid training. Contact your local Red Cross chapter for the teaching poster "When a Child is Choking," No. 1046.

NEWSWIRE

Three Factsheets To Help You Through A Long, Hot Summer

FSIS has prepared three backgrounders devoted to the types of foodborne bacteria that, if left unchecked, could make a long, hot summer even longer.

These semi-technical publications are written for sanitarians, Extension agents, teachers and health professionals interested in the causes of food-borne illness.

They are

- "Campylobacter Questions and Answers," a 4-page backgrounder that describes the bacteria, the illness it causes, how to control it and safe food handling tips to aid prevention.
- "Preventing Foodborne Listeriosis," an 8-page backgrounder about the organism, how it's transmitted, identified and controlled, what USDA and FDA are doing about it and how to prevent infection. Note: This pamphlet was updated in April

1992 with special precautions for the elderly, newborns, pregnant women and those with weakened immune systems to reflect recent CDC recommendations.

- "Salmonella Questions and Answers," a 4-page backgrounder about the best known of the foodborne bacteria.

All three backgrounders are new or recently revised. They are available, free, by writing to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, FSIS Information Office, Room 1162 South Building, Washington, D.C. 20250.

—Herb Gantz

Introducing NEFLE—the National Exchange for Food Labeling Education

NEFLE is a joint undertaking by USDA and the Food and Drug Administration to support government and private efforts to help consumers understand the new nutrition labels due out in 1994.

"The NEFLE framework will encourage exchange of data and creative ideas to boost this important effort," said USDA coordinator Wayne Baggett.

The challenge. The morning session of the first NEFLE meeting (Feb. 27, 1992 in Rockville, Md.), featured presentations on the government's nutrition labeling plans, nutrition labeling education and what NEFLE can hope to accomplish.

Dr. Fred Shank, head of FDA's Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition, called the move to improved nutrition labeling "the greatest consumer breakthrough since the Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act of 1938." The 1938 Act set standards still in use for honest and precise package labeling.

Bill Rados, director of FDA's communications staff, defined NEFLE's goal, saying, "Our target audience is everyone who eats, and our goal is to try to take the guesswork out of good nutrition."

Ann Chadwick, USDA's consumer advisor, called the NEFLE effort vital,

saying simply, "If consumers can't understand the new food labels, all the new information is for naught."

Everyone should be able to understand the new nutrition labels. For the new nutrition labels to improve national health, all Americans must be able to interpret them properly, so the afternoon session gave consumer groups and industry representatives a chance to tell how they intend to reach multiple audiences.

Sue Borra, from the Food Marketing Institute which represents grocers, said FMI will focus a large part of its efforts on in-store materials. "The average shopper makes 2.3 trips to the market every week," said Borra. "That gives us great exposure for the messages we want to develop."

Mary Stiedemann, Ph.D., from the American Heart Association, said AHA is preparing special nutrition label reading materials for teens (for classroom use) and the elderly. They're also developing materials for low-income groups. The emphasis will be on how to use the new labels to choose a heart-healthy diet.

Ellen Haas, for Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, announced the KNOW project—Know Your Nutrition Options Well. With funding from the Campbell Soup Co., Public Voice will launch the KNOW effort as a media campaign. "We think it's important for the public to use the new labels as part of overall healthy eating patterns," said Haas.

And Regina Hildwine, from the National Food Processors Association, said NFPA is tailor-making a kit for consumer educators with the working title "Label Facts for Healthful Eating."

As NEFLE participants develop their label education materials, the Food and Nutrition Information Center at USDA's National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Md., will compile the information in a computer database. Information director Sandy Facinoli (301/504-5719) is the project coordinator.

—Mary Ann Parmley

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline now answers NUTRITION as well as FOOD SAFETY questions.



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